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STATE FOR WHA/CAR RCBUDDEN, INR/B

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR EAIR BF
SUBJECT: NEW BAHAMIAN CABINET BUILT FOR ACTION

REF: NASSAU 579

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham made his initial cabinet appointments May 7, with others following in subsequent days. With few exceptions, the new Ministers are experienced and well-suited to their portfolios, having served in Ingraham's previous government. Ingraham reorganized Cabinet to shrink the number of portfolios and ministers from 17 to 12, consolidating power and streamlining the Bahamian bureaucracy. The reorganization strategically join related portfolios under unified leadership, including the merger of National Security and Immigration, Tourism and Aviation, Health and Social Services, Education and Culture, and Works and Transport. The new cabinet also brings to the cabinet a good mix of private sector experience and individuals with a track record of achievement, in keeping with Ingraham's action-oriented approach to governance. In the early days, Ministers have reached to post to highlight their desire to work closely with the U.S. on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and illegal immigration to airport security and human rights.
END SUMMARY.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON NEW CABINET

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham named his new Cabinet May 7, following the appointment of three key national security-related Cabinet members on May 4 (reftel). The full lineup is as follows:

a. (U) Prime Minister and Minister of Finance: Hubert Ingraham.

b. (U) Minister of Foreign Affairs: Brent Symonette. See reftel for biographic reporting.

c. (SBU) Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs: Claire Hepburn. Hepburn, born 11/6/45, was not a candidate for election and serves in her ministerial assignment as an appointed Senator. She studied at the University of the West Indies (B.A.) the University of Miami (Masters in Education),

and was called to the Bahamas Bar in September 1985. She has served as a schoolteacher, then lecturer, Chairman of the Social Sciences department, Academic Dean and then Acting Vice-Principal of the College of The Bahamas. She is currently an adjunct lecturer in Civil Procedure at the Eugene Dupuch Law School and a partner in well-respected local law firm Graham Thompson. Her employment experience includes stints as acting Magistrate, acting Supreme Court Judge, director of the Bahamas International Securities Exchange, Director of the Bank of the Bahamas, Chair of the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas and Chair of the Gaming Board of The Bahamas. COMMENT: Hepburn is a well-respected political outsider with deep ties to the legal community and judiciary. Hepburn is likely to focus on improvements to the Bahamian legal system, particularly much-needed legal civil procedure reform to decrease the time to trial. She will also address complaints raised by judges in recent months of lack of judicial independence arising from salary issues. END COMMENT.

d. (SBU) Minister of National Security and Immigration: Orville "Tommy" Turnquest. Turnquest, born 11/16/59, is the son of former Governor General Sir Orville Turnquest and a former leader of the Free National Movement (FNM). He was educated at Malvern College in England, and graduated from the University of Western Ontario with a degree in Business. Before entering politics, he served 11 years as a banker for Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. He was elected to parliament in 1992 and again in 1997, but lost his both bid for reelection in 2002 and as party leader led his party to a crushing electoral defeat. From 1992 to 2002, he served in the previous Ingraham government as Minister for Public Service, Minister for Public Works and Immigration, and Minister of Tourism. From 2002-2007, he served as leader of the Opposition from the Senate. Turnquest assumed leadership of the FNM from Ingraham in 2002 in the face of near-certain electoral defeat and gracefully relinquished his leadership to Ingraham in time for 2007 elections. COMMENT: Turnquest's loyalty and self-sacrifice for the party has clearly kept him in Ingraham's inner circle. Turnquest does not have a strong national security background, although his experience as Immigration Minister will serve him well. With a reputation for honesty and a good relationship with the Embassy, Turnquest should be an effective partner in ensuring continued close law enforcement and military partnerships. This portfolio has traditionally been the purview of the Deputy Prime Minister, and gives Turnquest an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to lead the party in a post-Ingraham era. END COMMENT.

e. (C) Minister of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture: Carl Bethel. Bethel, born 7/1/61, is senior partner with Bethel, Moss & Co. and a graduate of the London School of Economics (LL.B. Hons.) and the Holborn Law Tutors. He was elected to Parliament in 1992 and 1997, but lost his seat in 2002. During the previous Ingraham administration, he served as Minister of Economic Development (2000-2001) and Attorney General (2001-2002). He is former National Chairman of the FNM (2003-2005), and an appointed opposition Senator (2002-2007). COMMENT: While AG, Bethel's disastrous attempt at Constitutional reform via national referendum is cited as a primary factor in the FNM's 2002 election defeat. END COMMENT.

f. (C) Minister of Housing and National Insurance: Kenneth Russell. Russell, born 10/22/53, graduated from the Walker Technical College, and attended - but did not graduate from - Nova Southern University. He taught industrial arts in Grand Bahama from 1973-1976, then worked a local oil refinery from 1976-2001. He served as chair and vice-chair of the Grand Bahama FNM constituency, worked on the Grand Bahama Housing Commission (1992-1998) and was a member of the Grand Bahama Local Government Council (1992-1998). Russell has been Member of Parliament for Eight Mile Rock area of Grand Bahama since 1997. During the first Ingraham government, he served mostly as a backbencher with a short, undistinguished stint (2001-2002) as Minister of Public Works. COMMENT: Not an intellectual, Russell has a strong background in grassroots

politics that fits his new portfolio tolerably well. His appointment as one of three Grand Bahama ministers reflects the FNM's determination to reclaim its political base in Grand Bahama and give priority focus to rebuilding the island's hurricane-devastated economy. END COMMENT.

g. (C) Minister of Tourism and Aviation: Neko Grant. Grant, 56 years old, has represented the Lucaya constituency of Grand Bahama since its creation in 1992. He has a bachelor's degree in business management from La Salle Extension University. He remains Group Manager at The Burns House, a Bahamian beer and spirits distributorship. His is best-known locally as an athlete, and is in the International Softball Hall of Fame. This is his first Cabinet appointment, though he has previously served as Chair of the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation and the Grand Bahama Housing Commission.

COMMENT: Grant lacks direct experience for his vital tourism portfolio, which is indirectly responsible for 60 percent of the Bahamian economy. He comes from a business background, however, and brings the kind of no-nonsense, action-oriented approach that Ingraham is seeking to set as a standard. In his first days in office, he has attacked the issues of airport security left behind by the previous government, taking initiative to reach out to the Charge to confirm that this is the new government's top priority. END COMMENT.

h. (C) Minister of Maritime Affairs and Labor: Senator Dion Foulkes. Foulkes, born 10/9/56, lost his race for Parliament and serves in his Ministerial appointment as an appointed Senator. He is a political legacy, the son of Sir Arthur Foulkes, one of the drafters of the Bahamian constitution and a founder of the FNM. Dion Foulkes was educated at Indiana University (B.A.) and is a member of the Bahamas Bar. He served in Parliament from 1992-2002, where he was Minister of Education and Minister of Maritime Affairs and Labor. He has also served as FNM Assistant Secretary General, Secretary General, Chairman and Deputy Leader.

i. (SBU) Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources: Larry Cartwright. Cartwright, born 1/19/48, was a teacher and principal for 31 years before turning to politics. He is also an experienced farmer and fisherman on Long Island, bringing a practical, local approach to his duties. Cartwright won his Long Island seat in 2002 as an Independent, promising better development of Long Island and a stronger local focus on outer islands. He joined the FNM in 2006 and was reelected to his Long Island seat in 2007 after running unopposed. COMMENT: Cartwright was courted by the PLP and FNM, and was likely promised a Cabinet seat in exchange for bringing his Long Island seat to the FNM. END COMMENT.

j. (U) Minister of Lands and Local Government: Sidney Collie. Fifty-six year old Collie, a former International Visitor Program grantee, is a long-time FNM insider. A former Deputy Leader of the party, he has served as appointed Senator, member of the FNM Central Council, FNM Election Coordinator and poll-worker. He attended the University of Miami (B.Ed., MBA) and Nova Southern University (M.Sc.). He was a schoolteacher before being called to the Bahamas Bar (1988) and forming the firm of Collie & Collie, where he continues to work. He was elected in 2007 in the Blue Hills constituency.

k. (U) Minister of Works and Transport: Earl Deveaux. Deveaux is another long-time FNM insider. He served in Parliament from 1992-2002, but lost in 2002 before being reelected in 2007. In the previous Ingraham administration he served as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ambassador for the Environment and Minister of Labor and Immigration. He is widely published on environmental, agriculture and social issues. He attended the University of Miami (B.A.) and Penn State University (M.A.).

l. (U) Minister of Health and Social Development: Dr. Hubert Minnis. Fifty-two year old Minnis is a physician at Princess Margaret Hospital, the main public hospital in The Bahamas, where he is Head of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Deputy

Chief of Staff. He attended the University of Minnesota and obtained his medical degree is from the University of the West Indies. He is former president of the Bahamas Medical Association, former Chair of the Bahamas Hotel Corporation and an associate lecturer at the University of the West Indies medical school. His 2007 election as representative for Killarney is his first elected position.

THOUGHTFUL CONSOLIDATION OF POWER IN CABINET

¶3. (SBU) Ingraham's appointments represent a shift in style of government, as he reduced the number of Ministries (and Ministers) from 17 to 12, even while increasing the number of Ministers of State within the ministries to reward successful candidates. According to FNM insiders, this consolidation reflects Ingraham's desire to make governance more efficient and make weekly Cabinet meetings efficient. (Under the PLP, cabinet meetings went from morning to night with few decisions emerging from the long deliberations.) To assist Ministers with their increased responsibilities, Ingraham also named junior ministers for many of the Ministries. On May 7, he named Desmond Bannister as Minister of State in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Zhivargo Laing as Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and Elma Campbell as Minister of State for Immigration in the Ministry of National Security. On May 14, he named additional Ministers of State including Branville McCartney in Tourism and Aviation, Phenton Neymour in Public Utilities, Loretta Turner in Social Services, and Byron Woodside in Youth and Sports.

¶4. (C) Several of the portfolio changes respond to public criticism of former PM Christie's organization. For example, road works and traffic issues -- a key local problem -- used to require elusive cooperation between the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Transport. The consolidation of the Ministries of Immigration and National Security recognizes immigration as a key national security issue and brings all three law enforcement branches - police, military and immigration - under one leader. By bringing aviation directly into the Tourism Ministry, Ingraham has recognized the importance of airlift and improvements in the country's many airports to the country's tourism product. In addition, key educational programs are no longer split between the Ministries of Education and Youth; social services programs are no longer divided between the Ministries of Health and Social Services; and frustration arising from split authority between the Ministry of Marine Resources and the Ministry of the Environment appears to be resolved by uniting the Marine Resources and Environmental portfolios.

COMMENT: A SERIOUS, ACTION-ORIENTED CABINET

¶5. (C) In making his cabinet appointments, Ingraham emphasized that he intended to "lead the country back to responsible, honest, and accountable government in the sunshine." He charged his new ministers with adhering to his seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. Having run a campaign based on restoring trust, Ingraham's cabinet will be held to high standards. If they trip up, Ingraham is not likely to hesitate -- as former PM Christie did -- to replace errant ministers. With his appointments of experienced, action-oriented ministers, Ingraham has clearly signaled his desire to consolidate power, streamline decision-making, and get down to work.

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